

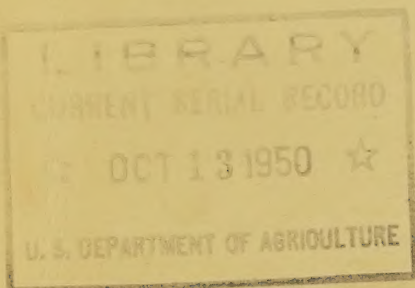
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CO-OP ELECTRIFICATION ADVISER TRAINING OUTLINE

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**ASSURING
MEMBER PARTICIPATION**



REA

PURPOSES OF THIS OUTLINE

This is one of a series of outlines prepared by REA as an aid in planning and arranging training schools for co-op electrification advisers. Each outline deals with a power use subject or with some aspect of cooperative principles and practice or with a particular method or technique of getting information to people. These are the three principal fields in which electrification advisers need to be skilled. Each booklet contains both suggested subject matter and suggestions as to how the material might be presented, with an indicator of a suitable time schedule. The booklet is

thus useful as a guide to committees in charge of training schools, as an aid to the instructors, and as a subject matter manual that may be distributed to participants at the close of a training session for study and future reference. Subjects available or in preparation are listed below by title and number. *It is suggested that committees planning such training schools keep in mind the need of training in all three types of subject matter and, insofar as practicable, make use of the outlines in a balanced combination.*

LIST OF SUBJECTS

An ORIENTATION OUTLINE (unnumbered) covers all three fields of information. It is to provide the subject matter for an initial school that will give co-op officials basic background information and an understanding of the nature and scope of the educational job to be done.

NO.	POWER USE SUBJECT	NO.	CO-OP SUBJECT	NO.	METHOD OR TECHNIQUE
✓ 1	Farm and home Wiring	✓ 100	Value of Co-op	✓ 200	Getting News to Members
2	Farm Motors		Membership		(Newsletters and State
✓ 3	Water Systems and	101	Integrating Power		Paper Columns)
	Plumbing		Use and Co-op	✓ 201	Using the Radio
4	Electric Ranges		Education	202	Co-op Reports and Non-
5	Laundry Equipment	102	The REA Program		periodical Publications
✓ 6	Poultry Production		and Co-ops	✓ 203	Making Effective Talks
7	Refrigerators, Home	✓ 103	The Electric Co-op	204	Demonstration Techniques
	Freezers, Walk-ins		— What It Is	205	Methods and Results of
8	Small Appliances	104	The Co-op Movement		Adult Education
9	Dairying		— Here and Abroad		
10	Pig Brooding	105	Co-op Bylaws	206	Effective Meetings
✓ 11	Farm, Home and	✓ 106	Establishing Member		
	School Lighting		Ownership	✓ 207	Photography and Motion
12	Farm Shop	✓ 107	Assuring Member		Pictures
13	Pump Irrigation		Participation	208	Working with Newspapers
✓ 14	Garden Watering	108	Co-op Tax Status	209	Exhibits and displays
15	Electric Hotbeds	✓ 109	Annual Meetings	210	Working with Rural Youth
16	Elevating, cleaning	110	Co-op's Place in	211	Working with Community
	and grading farm crops		the Community		Organizations
17	Drying grain, hay, peanuts, etc	111	Cooperation Between Co-ops	✓ 212	
18	Heating, cooling, ventilating				
19	Cleaners, dish washers				
20	Kitchen planning				

Suggested Program and Procedure

ASSURING MEMBER PARTICIPATION

Without members there would be no co-op; the phrase "member participation" therefore takes on significant meaning. This outline describes the nature of member participation and its importance to co-op success. It suggests ways for determining whether member participation is adequate and how it can be improved. Developing member participation is, of course, an essential part of the co-op's member information and education program. While the job requires full cooperation of board and staff, much of the planning and doing should be the direct responsibility of the Electrification Adviser.

Suggested Procedure. The following outline shows how this subject might be presented in a one-day program at a co-op electrification adviser training school. The topics would be developed largely through group discussion after brief presentations by persons expert in the various subjects. The outline suggests several devices for stimulating discussion.

Discussion Leader. The day's discussion leader is important to the successful development of this subject. He should be generally familiar not only with co-ops but also with the REA program. He should have had experience in stimulating and guiding group discussions. Someone who has the required training and has shown special interest in member education is a good possibility. If you have difficulty in locating a suitable person, REA may be able to help you find someone to serve as leader.

Program Chairman. The person selected to serve as general chairman for your entire training school or for this particular day's program will be of great help to the discussion leader, particularly if your chairman is an old-timer in the co-op movement.

The chairman can set the tone of the sessions by pointing out in his opening remarks that the participants are brought together not just for the purpose of exchanging ideas but for a training program intended to help them do their job more effectively.

Subject Matter Outline. Although the subject matter should be developed largely by the group, it is desirable for the leader, as well as the program speakers, to have a prepared subject matter outline as a guide, so as to make sure that no major points are overlooked in the discussion. Such an outline follows this suggested program outline. Extra copies of the subject matter outline for all co-op educational workers participating in this school may be obtained from REA. In general, it is found that the participants contribute more to the discussion and get more out of the meeting if the subject matter outline is mailed to them some days in advance of the meeting.

Suggested Program and Procedure (Cont.)

ASSURING MEMBER PARTICIPATION

Morning Session

<u>Time</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Speaker or Leader</u>
9:00	Opening Remarks: Statement of purpose of session and introduction of participants.	Chairman.
9:15	Talk: <u>"Why Participation of Members Is Essential."</u> Use of a blackboard to briefly list main points is effective and serves as a memory aid. Audience participation may be used to enlarge list of points.	Experienced co-op leader from the Statewide, from REA, from the Extension Service, or from an REA co-op that has outstanding success in member relations.
9:45	Group Discussion: <u>"Yardsticks for Member Participation in Your Co-op."</u> Co-op self-rating sheets (provided in the subject matter portion of this outline) supply a useful method for studying this topic. Participants can actually rate their own co-op on sample points as the discussion proceeds.	Discussion Leader for the day, or co-op leader with experience in use of self-rating sheets.
10:45	Recess.	
11:00	Panel Discussion: <u>"Who Shares Responsibility in Promoting Membership Participation?"</u>	Chairman and panel of four: Manager, director, electrification adviser, and member.
12:00	Recess for lunch.	

Afternoon Session

1:30	Brief summary of morning session.	Chairman.
1:45	Group Discussion: <u>"Obstacles to Effective Membership Participation."</u>	Discussion Leader for the day.

Suggested Program and Procedure (Cont.)

<u>Time</u>	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Speaker or Leader</u>
2:15	Work Session: <u>"How Can Member Participation Be Developed?"</u> Discussion Leader has participants number off into groups of 5 to 8. Each group meets in a separate room or different part of the main hall, elects a Chairman and a recorder to report the group's findings, and then proceeds to consider the topic.	Group leaders selected by each group.
3:15	Reports from Work Session: Upon reassembling in general session, the recorders report proposals of their groups and the Discussion Leader lists them on the blackboard. Merits of proposals should be discussed and points should be rearranged as nearly as possible in order of importance.	Discussion Leader for the day.
4:00	Work Session: <u>"Tackling the Job Locally."</u> Each participant works out on the basis of the previous topics a plan for his own co-op. These written proposals should be collected by the Discussion Leader for discussion and comparison. The Chairman should arrange to have these plans held for subsequent analysis, typed and returned later together with comments and suggested helps for practical application.	Discussion Leader for the day.
5:00	Summary and Conclusion.	Chairman.
5:15	Adjourn.	

REA personnel may be obtained upon request to serve as speakers or discussion leaders and to assist in the planning of Training School programs.

END OF PROGRAM. SUGGESTED SUBJECT MATTER OUTLINE FOLLOWS.

Suggested Subject Matter

ASSURING MEMBER PARTICIPATION

The following specific subject matter suggestions are intended as a check list to aid the chairman, discussion leaders and speakers in preparing their material for the program, and should also be found useful by participants.

Topic I. "Why Participation of Members Is Essential."

A. The members are the co-op.

1. In an ordinary commercial corporation there are customers and there are owners. Control is determined by a majority or sometimes by even less than a majority of the stock, representing money invested primarily in the expectation of dividends. The customers or patrons have no voice in the control of the business.
2. In an electric co-op -- and indeed in all consumer-type co-ops -- there are no separate customers and owners. The patrons of the business are also the owners of the business. Control is exercised by the user-members as joint owners -- by the very people whom the business serves. They are the co-op. Its success or failure will in the long run be decided by how much or how little active interest the members take in their co-op.
3. No commercial power company can match the potential strength which user-ownership gives a co-op. But this strength becomes real only if the co-op members know the facts about their co-op and the electric power they have at their fingertips. To see to it that the members are given the facts and full information about their co-op to which they as owners are entitled is one of the major responsibilities of co-op management.
4. Equally important is the board's responsibility to encourage the members at every opportunity to exercise their ownership rights by taking an active part in the co-op's affairs. A co-op whose board fails to enlist active and widespread member participation is a co-op only in name.

Suggested Subject Matter (Cont.)

5. "We care when we share." Members are interested in their co-op when they take part in the democratic selection of directors and when they help to determine broad general policy and over-all planning. For the long-time security of the co-op participation of all the members is essential.
6. Experience has shown that the best interests of the co-op are served in the long run by the widespread and active participation of its members.

B. What is member participation?

A large attendance at an annual meeting merely because of the food, entertainment and prizes offered is no sign of real member participation. What counts is what the members say and do about their co-op at meetings and elsewhere. Real member participation means:

1. A sharing of responsibility
 - a. In making sure of efficient operation of the co-op,
 - b. In the election of competent directors,
 - c. In making efficient use of electricity,
 - d. In replacing REA loan capital with member capital (capital credits),
 - e. In giving devoted service on the board or on committees when chosen,
 - f. In becoming informed about the co-op and its problems,
 - g. In making constructive suggestions;
2. A recognition of co-op benefits, such as
 - a. Dependable service at reasonable rates,
 - b. Growing personal share in ownership of the co-op,
 - c. Equal voting rights with other members in the control of the co-op,
 - d. Reliable power use advice;
3. Taking pride in co-op ownership by
 - a. Attending co-op meetings,
 - b. Protecting co-op property,
 - c. Helping to correct false information about the co-op among friends and business acquaintances,
 - d. Building good will for the co-op in the community.

C. Creating the climate for member participation.

1. Helpful member participation develops most readily when co-op management makes a sincere effort to demonstrate to the members the value of co-op membership by:

Suggested Subject Matter (Cont.)

- a. Providing dependable and economical service;
 - b. Offering reliable power use advice;
 - c. Informing the members of their rights as owners of the co-op;
 - d. Giving the members the facts about their co-op in understandable language;
 - e. Inviting constructive suggestions;
 - f. Assuring real democracy at meetings and a real choice in election of directors;
 - g. Establishing and maintaining channels of communication between the management (board and manager) and the members that will promote a ready two-way flow of information and of cooperation.
2. Failure by management to pave the way for member participation results in an apathetic membership which in time becomes a distrustful and discontented membership. Uninformed or misinformed members are an easy prey for rumor mongers. They may suddenly revolt against a well-intentioned board and inflict irreparable harm on the co-op.

D. Why is member participation a special problem in electric co-ops?

1. All co-ops have the problem of maintaining active member participation over the years. The small group of pioneers whose devoted efforts started the co-op is soon outnumbered by the many newer members who may take the co-op service for granted. The larger a co-op grows, the more it becomes necessary to carry on a member information and education program in order to stimulate member participation. Electric co-ops are no exception to this rule. In fact, they have a more serious problem in this respect than many other co-ops because they have grown larger and more rapidly than other types of co-ops.
2. Here are some of the reasons why our job in REA electric co-ops is more difficult:

Other types of co-ops

REA electric co-ops

- a. Capital supplied by members. The financial interest which the member has in his investment is a powerful incentive for maintaining his interest.

- a. Capital loaned by the Government, with members making only token investment in the form of a small membership fee. The member does not have the same obvious incentive to work for co-op success.

Suggested Subject Matter (Cont.)

- | | |
|---|---|
| b. Membership is voluntary, and most members join because they understand and believe in the co-op way of doing business. | b. Membership is voluntary, but most members joined because that was the only way they could get electricity. |
| c. Area served usually conforms to natural trade area and is usually concentrated. | c. Area served seldom conforms to natural trade area and is usually large with scattered membership. |
| d. Members have almost daily contact with their co-op organization when making purchases or sales. | d. Members have little contact with their co-op organization. When they want service they flip a switch. |
3. Most of the members of REA electric co-ops have, to begin with, little knowledge of what a co-op is and what rights and responsibilities co-op members have. Until they learn the value of co-op membership they look on the co-op as just another power company and on themselves as merely its "customers." That attitude does not make for helpful member participation.
4. Because electric co-ops are relatively new, many directors and most managers and other co-op employees had to tackle their jobs without the benefit of previous knowledge or experience in co-op principles and co-op organization. Therefore some of them did not realize the importance of promoting member participation. Instead of building on the initial widespread member interest which helped to get the co-op established, they made less and less use of the volunteer efforts of the growing membership. It is only recently that many boards and managers have learned to recognize the importance of member participation. But they also find that it requires more concentrated planning and effort to make up for a missed opportunity than it would have required if the opportunity had not been neglected so long.

Topic II. "Yardsticks for Member Participation in Your Co-op."

A. What is the situation?

The extent of member participation in your own co-op is easy to determine. Here is a test you can give yourself to see how your co-op stacks up. Answer the questions with a check mark in the "Yes" or in the "No" column. "No" answers indicate points in need of greater emphasis.

Suggested Subject Matter (Cont.)

(Democratic functioning of the organization)		<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
1.	Are valid annual meetings held regularly?	_____	_____
2.	Did you have a good member attendance at your last annual meeting?	_____	_____
3.	Was there a choice of candidates (more nominations than positions to be filled)?	_____	_____
4.	Did any members other than directors ask questions or discuss reports or business at the last annual meeting?	_____	_____
5.	Does your co-op make use of the volunteer services of members other than directors on any committees besides the nominating committee?	_____	_____
6.	Do most of your members know their rights and responsibilities as co-op members?	_____	_____
7.	Do most of your members understand what a co-op is?	_____	_____
(Member interest in operation of the co-op)			
8.	Do the members feel that they <u>own</u> the co-op?	_____	_____
9.	Are they proud of its progress and achievements?	_____	_____
10.	Are they willing to assume additional responsibility for its continuing success?	_____	_____
11.	Are they willing, when necessary, to devote their time and efforts without compensation to help the co-op (to "do chores")?	_____	_____
12.	Has their active interest in the co-op been maintained?	_____	_____
13.	Do they understand the rate schedule and how their patronage helps to build personal equities in co-op ownership for them?	_____	_____
14.	Are they correctly informed about the financial condition of the co-op?	_____	_____

Suggested Subject Matter (Cont.)

15.	Are members usually friendly to line clearing crews and other employees?	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
16.	Do members bring their complaints to the manager and board instead of spreading them around the community?	_____	_____
17.	Do most of your members know what taxes the co-op pays?	_____	_____
18.	Do more than 95 percent of your members pay their power bills promptly?	_____	_____
19.	Do members boast of how well they put power to use rather than complain about the size of the power bill?	_____	_____
20.	Do they call on the co-op for power use advice?	_____	_____
21.	Do they cooperate in keeping down load peaks?	_____	_____
22.	Do they report outages and dangerous line conditions promptly?	_____	_____
23.	Do you have less than 10 percent minimum users?	_____	_____
24.	Do members report their meter readings promptly and correctly?	_____	_____
25.	Do they understand and favor the REA policy of area coverage?	_____	_____

B. What is the co-op doing about it?

If your co-op does not come out well on the previous score sheet, checking this one below may help explain why that is so. Information is the basis of participation. To get a flow of participation from the members to the management of the co-op there must first be a flow of information from the management of the co-op to the members. To get this two-way channel of communication working is the job of management.

Suggested Subject Matter (Cont.)

(Reaching members directly)

Yes

No

1. Did the last annual meeting have the best possible advance publicity (through official notice, newsletters, county or community newspapers, radio announcements, posters, telephone and postal card reminders by a "neighbor-to-neighbor" campaign)? ____ ____
2. Did the last annual meeting give useful and easily understood information to the members (through exhibits, demonstrations, charts and posters, leaflets, movies or slides, reports by officers and manager)? ____ ____
3. At the last annual meeting was there time and opportunity provided for members to ask questions and receive full answers? ____ ____
4. Does every member have an up-to-date copy of the co-op's bylaws? ____ ____
5. Has every member received a copy of the REA booklet "A Guide for Members"? ____ ____
6. Was a copy of last year's annual report of your co-op distributed to all members? ____ ____
7. Is the co-op's financial statement given to the members in a form which most of them can understand? ____ ____
8. Has the tax status of the co-op as a nonprofit business been adequately explained to the members? ____ ____
9. Has the capital credits plan been explained to, and endorsed by, the members? ____ ____
10. Do all members receive regularly either a newsletter published by your co-op or a publication of your Statewide which contains news about your co-op also? ____ ____
11. Does your co-op have at least one electrification adviser? ____ ____
12. Do you maintain a regular schedule of neighborhood meetings on power use and co-op education? ____ ____

Suggested Subject Matter (Cont.)

13.	Do you have a "suggestion box" or grievance committee to take advantage of complaints and ideas which members offer?	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>
		_____	_____

14.	Does the co-op have an effective procedure for fully informing new members about the co-op?		
		_____	_____

(Reaching members through the community)

15.	Is the headquarters building and office kept clean and attractive?		
		_____	_____

16.	Are displays maintained in your headquarters' windows or lobby to carry on power use education or to explain how your co-op works?		
		_____	_____

17.	Does the co-op regularly give information to newspapers and radio stations in the area?		
		_____	_____

18.	Does your co-op furnish speakers to tell about the co-op at civic and commercial clubs? at meetings of farm organizations? in school assemblies and vocational agriculture classes? for 4-H and other youth groups?		
		_____	_____

19.	Is a positive effort made to cooperate with appliance dealers? wiring contractors? farm organizations? other co-ops in the area? local public authorities? civic improvement programs?		
		_____	_____

(Reaching members through the employees)

20.	Do employees have regular classes or meetings where they are given information about cooperatives in general and your own electric co-op and the REA program in particular?		
		_____	_____

21.	Are the employees fully informed about the co-op, its policies and plans?		
		_____	_____

22.	Do employees boost the co-op in talking with members instead of showing a critical or apathetic attitude toward it?		
		_____	_____

Suggested Subject Matter (Cont.)

- | | <u>Yes</u> | <u>No</u> |
|---|------------|-----------|
| 23. Does co-op management invite and seriously consider suggestions from employees for the good of the co-op? | ___ | ___ |
| 24. Are members and others treated courteously by the co-op office and outside staff? | ___ | ___ |
| 25. Are letters from members and others answered promptly and fully? | ___ | ___ |

Topic III. "Who Shares Responsibility in Promoting Membership Participation?"

As in so many other aspects of successful cooperation, the already interested members, the directors, the manager, the electrification adviser and other employees all share responsibility for protecting the health and security of their co-op by assuring an informed and participating membership.

A. Members.

1. Membership participation should begin, of course, with the members themselves. But uninformed members cannot be expected to go to much effort on behalf of the co-op. Only members who understand the value of co-op membership will carry their share of interest and responsibility, and they can do this only if the way to participation is opened to them.
2. There will always be found a core of loyal and hard-working members who are sparkplugs of the organization. It is up to management to enlist their help in building and maintaining active interest by all members, so that a broader basis of member participation can be developed. This broad foundation is essential to the long-range security of the co-op.

B. Directors.

1. Having been elected to office by the membership, directors in those co-ops which do not enjoy a high degree of member participation should guard against any action or attitude which might unwittingly discourage the cooperation of members in the affairs of the co-op.
2. The board has a three-fold responsibility in assuring active participation of the members:
 - a. Initiation and authorization of an effective power use and member education program;

Suggested Subject Matter (Cont.)

- b. Full support of the program after it gets under way;
- c. Providing every possible opportunity for active member participation in co-op affairs.

C. Manager.

- 1. As the full-time executive of the co-op, the manager is expected to advise the board on practical plans for building an informed membership and encouraging active member participation.
- 2. He is responsible for the effective carrying out of plans and programs approved by the board.

D. Staff.

Employees have frequent contacts with members and can and should encourage participation by the latter. They should avoid passing slighting remarks that may discourage the newer and poorly informed members and lessen their desire for participation in the affairs of their own co-op.

E. Electrification Adviser.

The major burden of any information and education program which aims at increased interest and activity of members in the affairs of their co-op naturally rests on the electrification adviser. He (or she) has the job of "doing" that comes out of plans approved by the board and turned over to the manager for execution.

Topic IV. "Obstacles to Effective Membership Participation."

A. Negative attitude by the leaders.

- 1. If leaders are unaware of the need for an interested and participating membership, even those members who already stand ready to pitch in with spare time and extra effort to make their co-op a strong and democratic organization may find their good intentions blocked by apathy and thereupon become discouraged.
- 2. Many people are easily swayed by the attitudes and opinions of their leaders. Some members who would cooperate with and support in many helpful ways a board and manager who encouraged their participation will be mere grumbling "customers" in an organization headed by men unwilling to let their neighbors share responsibility for the job to be done.

Suggested Subject Matter (Cont.)

B. Uninformed members.

1. Lack of information for the members leaves them without any basis for cooperating with management even when they feel the need for participating in the control of their organization. There are cases on record of co-ops which were crippled by the suspicions and fears of members who were not kept informed of the true situation with respect to problems and conditions within their co-op.
2. When members do not receive full and correct information regularly from their board and manager they pick up rumors, gossip and distortions from whatever sources are available. Much of this false and damaging information originates from people unfriendly to the co-op's interests.
3. The temporary obstacle of an uninformed membership can be easily removed by directors and a manager who see the need for an informed and participating membership.

C. Inadequacy of the co-op's structure.

1. The large service area and scattered membership of some electric cooperatives is a handicap to the active participation of members. Great distances which separate members physically may also separate them psychologically. It should be taken up as a challenge to the ingenuity of manager and board. Districting of territory and increased reliance upon community meetings and upon postal, telephone, and radio communications provide approaches to the removal of these barriers.
2. Lack of a working procedure for handling complaints, grievances, and suggestions which gives to members definite answers in a courteous manner allows members to pass on their "gripes" to neighbors, thus spreading dissatisfaction. Setting up a grievance committee or suggestion box channels complaints and suggestions into the manager's office where they can be the basis for improved service and savings in operations.
3. Failure to adopt a Capital Credits Plan may be another reason why interest and participation lag. The Capital Credits Plan provides members with evidence of their share of ownership in the co-op and thereby stimulates a sense of responsibility.

Suggested Subject Matter (Cont.)

D. Discouraging attitude of employees toward members.

1. Employees who have not had cooperative principles and operations explained to them may take a brusque attitude toward members' interest in operations, discouraging any desire to participate.
2. Employees who are not well-informed about the co-op's status, activities, and operations, are apt to pass on to members and nonmembers distorted information and mere opinion which may discourage member interest and activity.
3. The loyalty of members can be damaged by disparaging remarks about the co-op from the employees with whom they come in contact.

Topic V. "How Can Member Participation Be Developed?"

A. Constructive attitude of the co-op's management.

The prerequisite for any program to develop real member participation is a sincere realization on the part of the directors and of the manager that:

1. The co-op belongs to its members;
2. A co-op should be run democratically;
3. Co-op management is responsible to the membership;
4. The members are entitled to full information about their co-op;
5. An informed membership is the best health insurance for the co-op;
6. Keeping the members informed is a major responsibility of co-op management;
7. The cost of a member information and education program on cooperation and power use is a legitimate part of the cost of operating a co-op;
8. Active participation by an informed membership is a valuable aid to co-op management;
9. An uninformed membership means a weak co-op, regardless of how good the financial balance sheet may look;
10. It is management's responsibility to encourage member participation wherever and whenever possible.

Suggested Subject Matter (Cont.)

B. Proper organizational structure.

1. If the co-op's membership is too scattered and the service area is too large to permit much membership participation, some advantage can be derived from dividing the co-op area into districts. This can be done by actual revision of the bylaws to permit annual district meetings and selection of directors on a geographical basis, or the districting can be informal for the purpose of setting up local information and participation programs.
2. There are certain bylaws provisions which encourage membership participation.
 - a. Limiting or entirely eliminating proxy voting and thereby placing more emphasis on personal attendance at annual meetings;
 - b. Provisions for nomination of directors by petition and from the floor and requirements that the number of nominees exceed the number of positions to be filled (there is little incentive for members to come to an annual meeting to vote for a single slate of directors with no choice of candidates);
 - c. Adoption of the Capital Credits Plan by amending the bylaws assures members a personal financial stake in the co-op and thereby heightens their interest in the affairs of the enterprise.
3. A staff organization plan which delegates to the electrification adviser and to other employees definite responsibilities in relations with members will be helpful. An employees' training program should be included.
4. Many problems faced by co-op management can be solved better through the use of committees (such as an education committee, special committees in connection with annual meetings, etc.). At the same time such committees can provide many opportunities for member participation. But it is up to the board to make sure that every committee serves a real purpose, functions effectively and is disbanded when no longer useful.

C. Flow of information to members.

There are many channels through which information can flow from the co-op to its members. All of them should be explored and used as much as practicable.

Suggested Subject Matter (Cont.)

1. Office visits.

- a. Personal contacts can be the most effective way of enlisting a member's cooperation and participation. They give the best opportunity to clear up misunderstanding and to impart correct information.
- b. The member's visit to the headquarters of his co-op is an opportunity to build his pride of ownership and to enlist his cooperation in the affairs of his co-op at very low cost and with minimum effort.
- c. The visit itself -- even if for nothing more than to see about an adjustment in billing or to make a complaint -- is an act of participation.
- d. Make this an occasion for the member to meet employees he would otherwise never know. Show him the headquarters building his patronage is paying for -- "You have paid for many offices; this one you own." Give him a new leaflet on power use or the cooperative movement to take home. Tell him or ask his advice about some new electrification development on his farm or in his area.
- e. Be sure the office is kept clean and attractive. Use the window space and office corners for power use displays or exhibits showing how the co-op organization works, growth of the co-op, a map and pictures of the system, photos of the last membership meeting. Have a suggestion box in a convenient place, equipped with pencil and paper for the ideas and "gripes" that visiting members may want to register.

2. Home visits.

- a. As in the case of office visits the personality factor is important here.
- b. Make the visit as informal and casual as possible, but have a purpose.
- c. Always leave something -- a new leaflet on power use or a copy of some other co-op's newsletter, or a picture of the co-op's headquarters, or some pamphlet on the cooperative method of doing business.

Suggested Subject Matter (Cont.)

- d. Be on the alert for tips and aids you can give during the visit. Don't try to tell the farmer how to run his farm or the housewife how to manage her home.
 - e. Encourage the member to make suggestions about power use and operation of the co-op.
 - f. Invite questions, but avoid wrong answers. If you do not know the answer, say so and promise to find out. Be sure to follow up on any promised information.
 - g. Except in special situations, home visits are not the most efficient use of an electrification adviser's time.
3. Neighborhood meetings.
- a. Closely tied in with home visits are demonstrations of the best ways of using electrical equipment and the significance of wiring in the operation of equipment. Usually these demonstrations will be on farms and will be viewed by neighbors individually and in small groups.
 - b. When groups assemble to observe demonstrations the occasions may be social as well as educational. On some occasions the assembly may be large enough for reporting to the county paper. Photographs would be useful in such a report.
 - c. Neighborhood meetings, whether to observe power use demonstrations or for other purposes, provide occasions for cementing of cordial relations, answering questions, appointing committees, distributing literature, and promoting an understanding of co-op principles and member privileges and obligations.
 - d. This is an occasion when questions by members can be answered, when volunteers can be placed on the co-op's committees, and when publications of REA and the co-op can be left to help members in understanding the value of participation in their organization and in coping with problems of efficient power use and maintenance.

Suggested Subject Matter (Cont.)

4. Annual meetings.

This is the most obvious and spectacular point in the co-op's schedule of events for emphasizing the all-important role of members. There are two phases which co-op management must keep in mind if annual meetings are to be successful:

- a. Get the members to the meeting. The best-planned program of reports, co-op business, and features of education and entertainment will be wasted if you do not make an all-out effort to secure a high attendance.
 - (1) Try wording the notice of the annual meeting in a more informal and neighborly manner.
 - (2) Besides the notice by mail, be sure to use newspaper, radio and poster publicity.
 - (3) A telephone and home visit campaign to reach every member on a personal basis with information about the meeting increases attendance and interest.
 - (4) Some special feature, such as an old-fashioned family picnic, entertainment, movie, baking contest, or door prizes may prove to be an additional drawing card but should not overshadow the business meeting.
- b. Give the members a well-planned program. The work of getting a good turn-out has been largely futile if members go home feeling that the meeting was a waste of time.
 - (1) Meeting facilities should be selected with an eye to comfort and convenience (enough space, comfortable seats, proper heat and ventilation, good light, acoustics).
 - (2) Exhibits and displays add glamor to a meeting, inform the members, and encourage attendance at future meetings.
 - (3) Carefully prepared agenda are necessary to secure useful audience participation.

Suggested Subject Matter (Cont.)

- (4) Adequate reports, mailed in advance, enable members to come to meetings with enough information to ask sensible questions and to offer worth-while proposals.
- (5) Audience participation features (e.g., what are problems or questions of members?) pep up meetings and give members practice in presenting their views.

5. Publications, radio and exhibits.

In addition to these four "face-to-face" opportunities the co-op leaders should plan an effective year-around program for reaching the members through:

- a. An attractive and informative newsletter sent to members on a regular (monthly) basis;
- b. Occasional mailings of letters or reports from the president, or leaflets on power use or cooperative information;
- c. Stories in local newspapers;
- d. Radio broadcasts (talks, interviews, dramatic presentation of "How We Brought Power to _____ County," spot announcements);
- e. Exhibits at the county fair or in a shop window in communities within the service area.

D. Reaching new members.

The best time to encourage interest by members is when they first join. After the initial period of newness wears off without a new member being held to his obligations, the casual attitude becomes habitual. Stirring up the interest of an old member who has been accustomed to letting the manager and the board run the co-op without any help or support is not easy. Start now to work on participation of new members.

- 1. A home visit is desirable at the outset by the electrification adviser, a director, or a member of the membership or education committee who is well versed in the background of REA and co-ops.

Suggested Subject Matter (Cont.)

2. A "new member's packet" (including a membership certificate, copy of the bylaws, the REA booklet "A Guide for Members," and other items) should be mailed or presented to each new member promptly.
3. A visit to headquarters for a brief tour, a look at the exhibits, and introduction to some of the employees should be arranged as soon as practicable.

E. Enlisting members' help.

One way of building a core of members who are concerned with the welfare of the co-op is to ask receptive members to serve as volunteer committee members for keeping other members informed and for talking over the co-op's problems. Done on a geographical basis this "warden" system can be useful in holding the co-op together between annual meetings, in preparing for annual meetings, in facilitating power use demonstrations, in setting up experimental installations, in maintaining clean right-of-way, in signing up new members to secure 100 percent participation in area coverage, and in forming emergency crews in times of community disaster.

1. Committeemen will probably have to be recruited by personal contact.
2. New members are more susceptible to volunteer service and committee work than older members.
3. Give out specific assignments and then follow these up, lest the whole arrangement become a paper plan without substance.

F. Good service.

Members may hesitate to identify themselves with an organization which provides poor service. Good service, then, may be a useful prerequisite to active participation by the members. However, in a co-op which has good member interest poor service is less likely to develop.

Topic VI. "Tackling the Job Locally."

- A. What is the local situation? By making good use of its personnel and of the volunteer services of interested members and other rural leaders and educators, every REA co-op can develop a program suited to its needs and moderate in cost. On the basis of the discussion under Topic II you will be able

Suggested Subject Matter (Cont.)

to rate your own co-op in effectiveness of member participation. Considering also some of the obstacles listed under Topic IV, you can determine with some accuracy how successful your co-op is in terms of democratic operation and membership loyalty and control. What are the weak spots? What needs to be done?

- B. What is your plan for improvement? The discussion under Topic III determined that just about everybody has some responsibility for increasing member interest and participation, but that the efforts of the manager and of the electrification adviser may be essential in presenting this subject before the board in a manner which will obtain understanding and support. Whatever plan is approved will probably fall upon your shoulders for activation. Out of the discussion under Topic I and Topic V and from your own experience can you work up a plan which will fit the needs and resources of your co-op?

Any plan for encouraging and assuring member participation must, of course, fit into the over-all framework of the co-op's member information and education program. It should be discussed with the manager and with the co-op's educational committee if there is one. The manager may wish to present it to the board himself in the presence of the electrification adviser, or he may ask the latter to do so, or it may be presented by the educational committee.

The plan should outline not only what is to be done, but also how it will be done and who is expected to do what. Since not everything can be done at one time, it should also indicate the order in which the activities are to be developed and what activities it is planned to concentrate on in the beginning. Naturally, the more help the electrification adviser is able to get from others, the more effective a job will be done, both in the number of members reached and in the range of activities carried on simultaneously.

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